

**Welcome Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
On the Occasion of the Official Opening of the ART in
Embassies Exhibition
June 21, 2012
Georgetown, Guyana**

Your Excellency Acting President Samuel Hinds, Honorable Minister of Youth, Sports, and Culture, Frank Anthony, other Ministers, Members of the National Assembly, members of the Diplomatic Corps, and our special guests this evening: members of the artistic community of Guyana.

On behalf of the United States Embassy in Georgetown, Guyana, my wife, Saskia and I are truly delighted to welcome you to our residence and to this special celebration of the art and culture of the United States of America and the Republic of Guyana.

This is a special occasion – one we have looked forward to since I was nominated to serve as Ambassador to Guyana and Saskia and I began working with ART in Embassies to assemble the impressive collection of art you see before you this evening. We are thrilled to be able to share this exhibition with you.

This is also a special occasion because, this year, the Department of State is celebrating a half century of the ART in Embassies program. This trailblazing cultural program was created in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy to deepen cross-cultural dialogues and foster mutual understanding through the visual arts. Today, ART in Embassies is one of the United States' premier public-private partnerships, with over 20,000 individual and institutional participants and a presence in some 200 embassies and residences in 189 countries worldwide.

Secretary Clinton observed that “connecting people to people through the visual arts advances freedom of expression and invites an exchange of ideas.” This mandate is shared by Guyana's Ministry of Culture, which also actively promotes visual and fine arts and encourages cultural promotion and partnerships. We welcome the presence of Minister of Youth, sports, and Culture, the Hon. Frank Anthony, who is passionately committed to enriching Guyana's artistic and cultural heritage.

Saskia and I are fully committed to a vigorous exchange of art and culture between the United States and Guyana, and our Embassy's

public outreach reflects that commitment. In April last year, our Embassy partnered with the National Museum to co-host an art display promoting nature photography, which also helped to promote eco-tourism in Guyana. The United States Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation provides tremendous partnership opportunities for public and private sector groups who can propose projects to promote cultural preservation. We recently supported a visit by an American dance group, the Keen Dance Theater, that performed together with one of Guyana's leading dance groups, Classique. And I am committed to bringing to Guyana an American jazz group during my tenure here. It is our hope that tonight's cultural event will ignite additional creative exchanges between our countries.

This evening we are very pleased to be able to share with you the talents of a distinguished group of American and Guyanese visual artists. Visual art, whether painting or sculpture, is both an art and a craft. As art, it embodies the unpredictable nature of the imagination, which, like the wind, blows where it wills, but as craft, it is an organized and highly refined skill in our complex societies. This interplay of the volatility of

the imagination and the practical earthbound nature of craft gives rise to distinctive artistic traditions that reflect the thought and feeling of the artists and their culture.

When we were asked by the curator of the ART in Embassies program, Sarah Tanguy, what we would like to bring to Guyana with our exhibition, Sasha and I were both drawn to the Romantic tradition in American painting – paintings that are rich in feeling and poetic in their use of light and tone that become the starting point for deep reflections and conversations. The Romantic painters, including Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Albert Bierstadt, and Frederick Church, were some of the first artists to see our wild and lonely continent *itself* as a theme of art. They turned their romantic sense of wonder upon nature, creating paintings that evoked the wild and solemn beauty of the American wilderness, and were infused with reverie, excitement, and inner happiness. They also discovered that the study of the simple, the humble, the familiar in human life was equally rewarding – that the ballad of the street could be wonderful to the discerning eye. The works

of art we have assembled this evening, both American and Guyanese, capture this wonder of nature and the beauty of the humble and familiar.

Saskia and I now call the State of Maine our home in the U.S., and we wanted to bring to our friends in Guyana the natural beauty and simplicity that attracted us to Maine as our source of rootedness in an ever shifting diplomatic life. Maine is known for its many waters -- coastlines, rivers, lakes and inlets – as well as for mountains, forests and miles of wide open spaces where you can float downriver or hike in the woods for miles without being disturbed. Guyana likewise is a land of many waters -- of rivers, waterfalls, and seacoasts, leading to rainforests, savannahs and its own mountains. So the art showcased this evening, we believe, captures some of the commonalities between the landscapes of Maine and Guyana, as well as their distinctive characteristics. We have been especially pleased to see that many of our guests have seen their own connections between the landscapes of Maine and the beauty of Guyana in the works of art presented tonight.

As I observe in the brochure that I hope each of you will take home with you this evening, diplomacy at its best is about finding

commonalities while understanding and appreciating differences. Saskia and I believe this joint exhibition provides an ideal frame of reference to begin conversations to find that common ground.

We are pleased to bring into focus not only the work of our seven American artists, but especially the rich and exciting work of the five Guyanese artists who generously agreed to participate in tonight's exhibition. I encourage all of you to take this opportunity to get to know and support these talented Guyanese artists: Desmond Alli, Merlene Ellis, O'Donna Allsopp, Aiesha Scotland, and Winslow Craig. I hope you will consider supporting these artists and contributing to the growth and vitality of the arts in Guyana.

As I observed earlier, the American romantic tradition brought to life the wonder of nature and the beauty of the humble and familiar. The Guyanese art works showcased this evening offer compelling reflections of Guyana's nature, society, and culture. Winslow Craig's offers us a sculptural tour de force, "Reaching," -- hands stretching upwards aspiring to a better life, poignant in their helplessness and fragility, yet powerful in their unity and strength. "Fast Bowler," a work of

extraordinary fluidity and grace, captures the glory days of West Indies cricket's artistic fast bowlers and suggests perhaps the artist's yearning to relive those days of glory.

Desmond Alli's masterful sculptures tell stories, stories of Guyana and the history of the region as captured in his two pieces on display, *Art in the Resistance* and the *Regional Integration Monuments*. Both evoke Guyana's Amerindian forms, while telling a broader national and regional tale.

Merlene Ellis' paintings masterfully capture the vibrancy of life in Guyana through her brilliant and impressionistic brushwork. Like the American Romantics, she turns ordinary scenes into extraordinary images—the woman patiently kneading in *Bread*, the mysteriousness and *chiaroscuro* nature of the *Night Vendor*, the hustle and bustle of the *Stabroek Meli*, the serenity of the boat scene in *Company by the River*, and the patience of the pigeons in *Waiting for Droppings*.

O'Donna Allsopp's romantic landscapes are stunning in their ability to capture the beauty of the interior as seen in *Cane Burning* and *Sunset at Aishalton*.

Aiesha Scotland's vases glow with iridescent color. The warmth of the terracotta and the coolness of the cobalt hues of her pottery are magnified by the linear textures with which she imbues her work. And if you look closely at Aiesha's color palette and patterns, you can see commonalities with the color palettes and patterns of some of the landscapes in the American art work on display.

Each of the art works exhibited this evening tells a story inspired by the artist's life experiences. When Saskia and I met Lynne Seitzer, whose *Aspects of Sway* and *Relationship of Grace* are featured this evening, she shared with us that family was the inspiration behind these emotional landscapes. Winslow Craig's stunning "Family Circle" also brings to life the strength and unity of the family and the interconnectedness among its members.

All of us who are here this evening are privileged to be able to savor the inspiration and the craft of these twelve very talented and imaginative artists. I trust that you will be inspired to think about what binds us together even as we express ourselves in diverse ways.

Mr. Prime Minister, honored guests, on behalf of Saskia and our extraordinary Embassy team – especially our Public Affairs and Management teams who worked so hard to bring this exhibition together, I am honored that you have been able to help us celebrate the launch of our ART in Embassies exhibition and fifty years of ART in Embassies. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of the artists in sharing their creative energies to make our exhibit a memorable one. We hope you will continue to enjoy this exhibition and explore the commonalities and distinctive character of the assembled works of art, while appreciating the romantic beauty and simplicity of life in the nature and the people of Guyana and the United States.

Thank you.